Dear readers,

This is my first issue as the new editor of Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal and I hope to be able to continue the excellent work done by Angus Morrison-Saunders, Francois Retief and Riki Therivel over the past few years. A clear indication of their success in editing the journal is the ISI impact factor finally achieved in 2016. This took years of preparation and having obtained a factor of 1.0 is excellent. So a big thank you to them for getting the journal into a favourable position.

As an editor, I would like to precede each issue of IAPA with a short editorial in which I intent to discuss a topic receiving widespread attention in the media and which is relevant to impact assessment and project appraisal. In this context, if you have any specific suggestions, please let me know.

Living in the UK in July 2016, the obvious topic to write about is the referendum on the British exit from the EU (widely referred to as BREXIT), as some of the lessons emerging from the campaign and the referendum itself are of great relevance for impact assessment (IA). In the referendum, of those casting a vote (72% of the electorate), 51.8% chose to leave the EU (about 17.4 M; total population of the UK is just over 64M).

What makes the referendum particularly interesting from an IA point of view is that before the vote, a majority of economic and various other experts had warned about the significant negative impacts leaving the EU would have (45% of all UK exports and 53% of all its imports are EU bound; http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7213), ranging from reduced economic growth (and the possibility of a prolonged recession) and associated rising unemployment, over companies relocating to other EU member states to disadvantaged regions losing what in some cases are substantial EU development funds and a reduced level of environmental and social protection. Whilst the ‘remain’ (i.e. staying in the EU) side developed their campaign around various predictions of expected negative impacts, using a range of assessment techniques, along with what they saw as substantial social, environmental and other (e.g. peace and stability) benefits (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/517415/treasury_analysis_economic_impact_of_eu_membership_web.pdf), the leave campaign did not aim at producing substantiated predictions on the wider potential impacts (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/19/inaccurate-pro-brexit-infacts-investigation-media-reports-eu-referendum). Instead, they focused on the UK’s financial contribution to the EU, which they claimed was too high, and on what they portrayed as the ‘undemocratic’ structures of EU institutions, a perception of ‘uncontrolled’ (i.e. too high) immigration into the UK and an associated desire to – as they put it – ‘take back control’. In this context, they complained that David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister (PM) had been outvoted in the European Council (EC) 40 times (http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/briefing_control). However, what they did not mention was that the UK had been on the winning side of all EC votes 97.4% of the time in 2004-09 [under the then Labour government] and 86.7% of the time in 2009-15 with Cameron as PM (https://www.theguardian.com/world/datablog/2015/nov/02/is-uk-winner-or-
In all public debates, the slogan ‘take back control’ was repeatedly used. A key promise brought forward by the ‘leave’ side revolved around ‘bringing down immigration’ (freedom of movements of goods and people are key principles of the EU and there are only very limited possibilities to ‘control’ them). Overall, whilst the ‘leave’ campaign based its case largely on a somewhat vague notion of ‘hope’ for a better future, the ‘remain’ side was focusing mainly on assessing and portraying the negative consequences leaving the EU would have. The ‘leave’ side’s strategy, on the other hand, appeared to be based on targeting people’s emotions, in particular with regards to a ‘fear of unrestricted immigration’, ‘paying too much to Brussels’, and ‘making Britain great again’ (http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3661657/Brexit-make-Britain-great-insists-Trump-forecasts-break-EU-warns-Europe-unrecognisable-without-migration-curbs.html). Also, the few figures that were provided for explaining why leaving was a good idea were mostly unfounded, e.g. with regards to the monetary contributions made to the EU or on South-Eastern European countries that were to join the EU ‘immediately’ along with ‘millions of additional migrants’ that were waiting to enter the UK (http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/661387/Migrant-crisis-Nigel-Farage-Turkey-EU-visa-free-travel). The ‘leave’ campaign provided (and as it is now clear, actually had) no plans on what exactly leaving the UK would or should look like, and a diverse range of countries were mentioned when quizzed on what a future relationship of the UK with the EU should look like, ranging from Norway over Switzerland to Canada and even Albania (http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/72c1cd00-321b-11e6-bda0-04585c31b153.html#axzz4DWlVYIFy).

Whilst to date (9 days after the referendum), BREXIT hasn’t actually started (this requires the UK government to trigger article 50 of the ‘Lisbon Treaty’, and some are expecting this not to start before 2017 at the earliest), it is worth reflecting on at least some of the possible reasons for why ‘leave’ won, even in the absence of producing sound evidence on why this would be positive, economically and otherwise, while the opposite side attempted to provide ‘facts’ on potential impacts:

1. Many voters appear to have approached the referendum as a ‘protest vote’ against what was seen as the ‘establishment’ or the ‘elites’ (about 75% of members of parliament supported ‘remain’, as did most big companies along with a large proportion of economic, social and environmental experts and think thanks); these included in particular voters feeling disadvantaged and left behind (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/25/brexit-vote-poor-elite).

2. The most widely read tabloid in the country with over 3 Million printed copies daily was fiercely advocating a ‘leave’ vote and was – as some have suggested – ‘manipulating’ its readership (https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/2016/06/23/wa-urge-you-to-make-history-and-win-back-britains-freedom-believe-in-yourself-and-our-countrys-greatness-vote-leave/); many leave voters are found in lower education groups; these make up most of the readership of this tabloid.

3. ‘Leave’ campaigners portrayed themselves as ‘anti-establishment’ and ‘anti-elites’.

4. The ‘leave’ side used anti-immigration and at times xenophobic rhetoric, which appears to have hit a nerve with many voters that feel disadvantaged and who perceive this as a problem and threat; in particular it was claimed that migrants were to blame for significant pressures on e.g. the National Health Service (NHS), schools and other public services; however, all available figures show that migrants in the UK contribute substantially more to...
the national GDP and pay significantly more into the social security system than they take out (http://infacts.org/mythbusts/migrants-arent-taking-benefits/).

(5) It was claimed that economic impacts weren’t as bad as ‘experts’ were predicting; in this context, the term ‘expert’ was used in a negative and derogatory way; during one public debate, one of the figureheads of the leave campaign said ‘I think the people of this country have had enough of experts [...] saying that they know what is best’ https://www.totalpolitics.com/articles/news/david-cameron-hits-back-vote-leave-attempts-downgrade-eu-%E2%80%98experts%E2%80%99.

(6) Finally, years of anti-EU rhetoric, not just in the tabloid press, but also the mainstream media are likely to have influenced the outcome of the referendum. In this context, the EU provided a convenient scape-goat for any national ills (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/19/inaccurate-pro-brexit-infacts-investigation-media-reports-eu-referendum).

In conclusion, whilst the ‘remain’ side aimed at providing substantiated evidence on impacts of leaving the EU, the ‘leave’ side did not make any serious attempts to do so. On the other hand, the ‘leave’ side mainly targeted emotions of the electorate, which the ‘remain’ side largely failed to do. This is a powerful reminder that it is unlikely for impact assessment to succeed in effectively influencing stakeholders if it only aims at delivering (scientific) evidence, in particular in what has been dubbed a ‘post-factual’ world (Ettema, 1987). As was suggested by e.g. Kennedy (1988) and others (see e.g. Fischer, 2016), IA needs to be understood as an art and a science, as decisions subject to IA are usually political. This underlines a necessity to carefully plan IA campaigns and to not just focus on producing ‘scientific’ evidence. In this context, it is of particular importance to involve ‘champions’ that people are willing to listen to and that are able to reach people’s emotions. Also, with regards to the point of the ‘leave’ campaign to contributing too much to the EU’s budget, there is a striking similarity to the old argument brought forward by those critical of IA that e.g. ‘EIA costs money and slows down development’ but without considering its benefits for proponents and others’ (Morrison-Saunders et al, 2015). In this context, it is important to make a positive case for what it is an IA proposes. Whilst the outcome of the referendum may have some very serious economic, social and environmental consequences over many years to come for the UK if and / or when implemented (depending on what the relationship between the UK and the EU will actually look like in the end), it provides for a fertile ground for impact assessment research. Time will certainly tell to what extent the despised experts were right or wrong.

Subsequently, this issue of IAPA consists of eight research papers, two professional practice papers, two viewpoints and a book review. Research papers include two on SEA on practices in Kenya and Namibia, one on regulatory impact assessment in Slovakia, one on health impact scoping in the Netherlands, one on political impact assessment in Bangladesh and one on cultural aspects in impact assessment in Brazil. The remaining two research papers focus on environmental impacts of roads in mountainous areas, and ‘challenges to integrating planning and policy-making with environmental assessment on a regional scale’. Professional practice papers report on practices from Hong Kong and Cameroon and the viewpoint looks at ‘managing rumor, looting, and suicide not as breaking news but as community disaster culture’.

I hope you’ll enjoy reading this issue of IAPA

Yours

Thomas Fischer, Editor
References


NB: All web references in the main text were last accessed on 6 July 2016.